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David Dorward

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### Abstract

The South African War was important in moulding the Australian Federation and in the creation of national self-identity. The controversies surrounding the rebel figure, Breaker Morant, addressed by Shirley Walker in an earlier issue of *Kunapipi*, continually resurface in the popular press, encompassing as that figure does many ambiguities of Australian national mythology that found expression at Gallipoli. 1 Memoirs and celebratory accounts of the war abound in which, however, the war is set apart, projected as an event outside: men seemingly returned and got on with their lives. Scant attention has been given to the significance of the South African experience to the men, to the 'curios' and other memorabilia brought home or to the impact of these on cultural perceptions.<sup>2</sup> This article focuses on the 'Boer War album' of Major Walter Howard Tunbridge, an officer commanding the Third Queensland Mounted Infantry, and on the perspective, values, and the events portrayed. 3

DAVID DORWARD

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The South African War was important in moulding the Australian Federation and in the creation of national self-identity. The controversies surrounding the rebel figure, Breaker Morant, addressed by Shirley Walker in an earlier issue of *Kunapipi*, continually resurface in the popular press, encompassing as that figure does many ambiguities of Australian national mythology that found expression at Gallipoli.<sup>1</sup> Memoirs and celebratory accounts of the war abound in which, however, the war is set apart, projected as an event outside: men seemingly returned and got on with their lives. Scant attention has been given to the significance of the South African experience to the men, to the 'curios' and other memorabilia brought home or to the *impact* of these on *cultural perceptions*.<sup>2</sup> This article focuses on the 'Boer War album' of Major Walter Howard Tunbridge, an officer commanding the Third Queensland Mounted Infantry, and on the perspective, values, and the events portrayed.<sup>3</sup>

Like many of his comrades, Major Tunbridge took his camera to the South African War. However his 'Boer War album' contains none of the familiar images of officers, military formations, and battles. His was rather an intriguing exploration of empire, race, and the erotic, a study of 'the Other'.

The Boer War was the first extensively captured by amateur photographers, coinciding as it did with technological developments in relatively inexpensive Kodak cameras.<sup>4</sup> As a result, historians of the Boer War have a wealth of images upon which to draw. Yet dangers lurk in the unreflective use of such images. Photographs are seductive for conferring a sense of reality, immediacy, and intimacy, an illusion of truth. However we forget that photographs are constructs: the photographer not only sees an image through his view finder, there is a partially conscious act of selection and subjective manipulation. The Boer War photographer Johannes Meintjes's unqualified juxtaposition of artists' sketches, often 'staged' professional photographs and amateur snapshots, is a salutary example of the pitfalls of so-called 'historic' images.<sup>5</sup>

Heroic romantic sketches like his were influential in shaping public opinion at the time but are the least reliable. The artist captured action that

left a mere blur on the photographer's plates, while enjoying total liberty with realities. Professional photographers, on the other hand, could only achieve clear, crisp images in formal, often staged, portraits, or by obscuring movement in distant battlefield panoramas. The most revealing images were often amateur 'snapshots', capturing elements absent from the public record. All images however raise issues of motivation, selectivity, legitimacy, and contextualization.<sup>6</sup> The photographer assumes an audience, a viewer, be it only themselves.

While loose photographs are analogous to fragmentary correspondence, an album like Major Tunbridge's is more akin to a diary. It represents a deliberate act of selection, reflecting the current interests and preoccupations of the compiler. It is a very personal statement, though influenced by wider cultural values and assumptions.

The ambiguities of 'colonial desire'<sup>7</sup> captured in Major Tunbridge's album and reflected in the images reproduced here, need to be viewed against the backdrop of settler racism and genocide that permeates Australian history. Ronald Hyam's rhetorical quip that 'sexuality was the spearhead of racial contact',<sup>8</sup> relates well to turn-of-the-century Queensland, an explosive mixture of gross gender imbalance and racism. Homoeroticism, never far from the surface in Australian 'mateship', was held in check by an aggressive white heterosexuality, generally directed against black women. Sexual exploitation of Aboriginal women or 'gin' by Europeans was commonplace.<sup>9</sup> While 'rape' was a term only applied to white women, black women were at times bought and sold, and occasionally murdered on whim, with little prospect of prosecution. Yet inter-racial relations were outside the bounds of respectable society, therefore socially clandestine. For middle-class males, it was a culture of socially forbidden and hidden desires.

The genocide against Queensland Aborigines that many Australians still seek to deny, was a reality for Major Tunbridge and his men. Shooting and strychnine poisoning of Aborigines was part of the cultural baggage they brought to South Africa. Yet the South African racial demography, and preoccupation of South African whites with the power of the Zulu, were in stark contrast to the Queensland experience and perceptions of Aborigines. The shock of confronting an overwhelmingly black population is recurrent in many Australian war diaries and letters. Some could see only 'dirty, greasy natives'.<sup>10</sup> Others, like Trooper Conder of the Third Queensland, were more receptive, to the extent of venturing into an African church service, to view with some astonishment 'civilized' blacks.<sup>11</sup> All were in some way, however, affected by their confrontation with 'the Other'.

### *The Third Queensland Mounted Infantry and the War*

Walter Tunbridge was 44, single, an architect and officer in the

Queensland Land Forces with a reputation for strike-breaking and opposition to organized labour, when he was commissioned as major commanding the Third Queensland Mounted Infantry Contingent in 1900.<sup>12</sup> The troopers and NCOs of the 3rd Queensland were mainly volunteers, overwhelmingly single rural labourers and stockmen in their early twenties, attracted by the pay and conditions in the midst of local drought and economic recession.<sup>13</sup> A seemingly competent and conscientious officer, he was cut off from his men by social distance as well as rank. An incident involving the assertion of his authority sparked a minor mutiny aboard the homeward-bound troopship *Morayshire*.<sup>14</sup>

The detailed military exploits of the Third Queensland Mounted Infantry are largely tangential to Major Tunbridge's Boer War album.<sup>15</sup> In brief, the unit sailed for Cape Town on 1 March 1900, eventually disembarking at Beira, Portuguese East Africa, on 2 April, and travelled overland to Bulawayo, Rhodesia, where they were incorporated as the 2nd Regiment of the Rhodesian Field Force.<sup>16</sup> A contingent participated in the relief of Mafeking, though Major Tunbridge's section did not come south until July. He saw action at Koster River and came under attack from General de la Rey at Elands River,<sup>17</sup> but, for much of the time, his forces were engaged in sweeps north of Pretoria between the Olifants and Crocodile Rivers, razing and looting outlying Boer farms.

As one trooper wrote, 'The work we are doing is anything but what we bargained for – burning houses and commandeering horses and sheep, and never getting a good go at the Boers'.<sup>18</sup> Trooper Conder was initially shocked by the looting: 'talk about men going mad, the way they fought and swore over the loot was something terrible. They were more like savages than white men.'<sup>19</sup> In early 1901, Tunbridge and the 3rd QMI moved into Cape Colony in pursuit of General De Wet,<sup>20</sup> but, 'Our luck was always against us, for on coming to a farm house we always learned De Wet was some two or four days ahead of us, and that he had taken all the horses.'<sup>21</sup> More often, the Queenslanders seemed engaged in looting 'curios' from hapless Boer families and rounding up 'niggers' of the Highveld.<sup>22</sup>

### *Major Tunbridge's Boer War Album*

Curiously, the pages of the album contain none of the usual images of whitemen-at-war. The images are not of battles but of clearing Africans off the veld, of an African concentration camp, and 'ethnographic' exotica. The apparently discordant juxtaposition of bare-breasted black women, effeminized 'tribal warriors', and the Boer War images were not casual. Walter Tunbridge's Boer War album was not a heroic record of military camaraderie. The images were icons of a particular, dominant way of objectifying race and gender under empire.

The album consists of forty-three African photographs, at least eighteen

of which were commercial prints. Tunbridge's snapshots are clearly distinguishable, many being overexposed or slightly out of focus, the hallmarks of amateur developing. There are even the occasional fingerprints left on the wet emulsion. The contact prints were trimmed, hence the irregular and varied sizes. None of the negatives have survived, which is not surprising as Tunbridge would have used unstable celluloid nitrate film. From the size and shape of the prints, it would appear that he used the largest and most expensive of the Kodak Cartridge cameras introduced in 1898. Only a few of the photographs are labelled. In addition to the African images, there are two photographs of Melanesians, at least one of which was a commercial print, labelled '122 Milnebay Native, N Guinea'.

What is immediately striking is the almost total absence of his own troops. In only one photograph is a trooper central and he is riding away from the camera in a haze identified as 'Locusts', the subject of the image. The men in mufti then are invariably Africans, the (to date often forgotten) 'Other' of the 1899-1902 conflict. African orderlies in laced shoes, leggings, campaign hats and uniforms are photographed at attention or carry galvanized buckets on their head (see p. vi). Three times Tunbridge photographed the same stalwart young man, but felt no need to record his identity. Orderlies were servants, momentarily plucked from invisibility by his camera. They were objectified, captured, and controlled, made into signs of the ordering and civilizing power of the military and of African subordination.

The album contains several images of 'Native Huts'. Their thatched roofs are in good condition, the encircling walls well-maintained, but there is no sign of life. In one, a lone rider, his movement a blur, torches a native kraal, a shadowy plume of smoke drifting across the open veld. In another, tethered horses graze behind a granary. The eerie absence of the inhabitants is the most powerful aspect, embodying both a statement of imperial power and an extraordinary record of 'clearing' Africans off the veld.

In stark contrast to the emptiness of the 'native huts' are the numerous images of Africans in corrugated iron huts, the African 'refugee' camps documented in Peter Warwick's *Black People and the South African War*.<sup>23</sup> Africans, as well as Boers, were removed to concentration camps, their homes, cattle and granaries destroyed, in order to deny Boer troops access to supplies and remounts. From Tunbridge's field diaries, the camp was probably just outside Pretoria.<sup>24</sup> The tents and corrugated iron huts were clearly part of a sizeable settlement, laid out in regimented lines, a turn-of-the-century refugee camp, even a kind of township. Accommodations in these camps were cramped, with many wives sharing a common hut. Women and children in the photographs can be seen in the background, sitting in clusters outside neighbouring huts. While cooking pots lie scattered about, there are no signs of agriculture or animals, no cattle pens

or granaries. It was indeed the case that Africans were deliberately prevented from farming or bringing their own grain and cattle into the camps in order to force young men into wage labour. Provisions had to be purchased from the camp commissariat stores in a deliberate move to impose a cash economy. One of the few European images is of a civilian commissioner standing just inside a tent with two African women in woollen cloaks in the foreground.

The camps were part of a process of social dislocation and proletarianization of the African peasantry, reflected in the gendered dress. The few African men in the camp wear cast-off European trousers, shoes and greatcoats, symbols of their incorporation into the cash economy. The women, however, wear beads, hide, and blankets, indicative of their exclusion. Tunbridge took few photos of African women in European dress and then from a distance: a group of servants gathering at the gate of a white-washed house in a town, and women pounding grain outside a storehouse on the veld. In neither photograph is it clear whether the buildings or the people were the subject. These may have conveyed some special meaning, though generally appear concerned simply to locate the images within an alien setting.

The concentration camp images by contrast are less equivocal. They form a discrete sequence, taken during a single visit, and were clearly staged. The assertion of authority by the photographer is constant, if subtly contested on occasion. A younger woman with a child at her breast clearly catches his eye, being photographed from several angles. Then in the background another draws his attention, also nursing a child under her cloak (figure 1). He first photographed her with a female companion rather self-consciously balancing a can on her head. Their smiling continence conveys an indulgent humour that evaporates in the next image, in which the mother's cloak is turned back to reveal her bare breasts and the suckling child. Toward the end of the visit, the women have changed into beaded finery, a prized image captured from two slightly different angles. The last photos resemble modern South African tourist postcards of 'African women in traditional dress'.

Power in these images clearly rests with the invisible photographer: the camps were merely the location for his captive models. Tunbridge wasn't photographing the concentration camps; his preoccupations were with the exotic. However, the images don't totally obscure African agency: a child's meal interrupted, the iron pot with remnants of porridge nearby, the informality and clutter of ordinary life. There is also the clear transformation on the women's faces when they move from the buffoonery of the empty tin to their obvious discomfort at being asked to pose partly naked.

Tunbridge evidently had a fascination with standard erotica but, as the women in the camp were either immature girls or nursing mothers, he supplemented his own photos with a collection of high-quality commercial





Figure 1





Figure 2

photographs of young black women in studio surroundings. If the snapshots gave authority through their location, were the proof of his presence in what McClintock has labelled the 'porno-tropics' of European imagining,<sup>25</sup> then the commercial photos gave flesh and authority to his fantasies. In making such images, and catalogues of numbered prints, photographers, such as George Ferneyhough and J. Wallace Bradley, travelled South Africa with beaded pubic aprons and necklaces with which to dress their subjects. The album contains four photographs of different women all wearing the same pubic apron.<sup>26</sup>

While older African women in the album are represented as drudges, exploited within un-Christian polygamous households, young women invariably clad in skimpy beadwork, bare-breasted and 'accessible', gaze directly into the camera or lie submissively on the ground. The poses range from demure to seductive, with explicit titles such as 'Recounting a Love Affair'. In an age when middle-class gentlemen might not openly ogle Scandinavian bathhouse photos, they could indulge in voyeuristic fantasies of scantily-clad 'natives' in the name of amateur imperial ethnography. Ethnographic erotica was an acceptable form of soft pornography.

By contrast, whereas a positive, overt sexuality permeates many images of the women, African males are emasculated. 'Zulu fighting men, S. Africa. 40.312 G.W.W.' depicts three scrawny men with shields and knobkerries, symbols of the warlike savage, yet evoking no challenge to the forces of civilization (figure 2). Any implication of virility has been stripped away, their stance is passive, even submissive. Their potency, along with their war-shields, have shrunk to mere tokens. Similarly, Zulu chiefs have been transformed from the corpulence of physical and political 'big men' to impotent obesity. Once-powerful Zulu chiefs are portrayed as subdued, almost effeminate. In one retouched photo, the sagging pectorals are outlined to exaggerate the breast-like appearance. Black masculinity was thus very conventionally reduced, and male virility excised.

Ambiguities of meaning and intent permeate the album. While fascinated with and drawn to black women's bodies, Tunbridge's images are yet concerned to project imperial authority and to suggest savagery brought under control. Such preoccupations with the imperial exotic may also help to explain the enormous quantities of 'Zulu' beadwork and assegais, mementoes of difference, which were brought back to Australia by returning soldiers in their rucksacks.

## NOTES

1. Shirley Walker, "'A Man Never Knows his Luck in South Africa': Some Australian Literary Myths from the Boer War", *Kunapipi*, XVIII, 2/3 (1996), pp. 15-26. See also Kit Denton, *The True Story Behind the Execution of Breaker Morant* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1983).
2. Several years ago I compiled a register of African artifacts in Australia and New Zealand, a project funded by the Australia Research Council. There are large collections of South African weaponry and beadwork in Australasian museums, most of it from the Boer War period.
3. A set of prints from the album, along with Major Tunbridge's 'Boer War curios', mainly beadwork and weaponry, were donated to the African Research Institute, La Trobe University, by his daughters, in 1995.
4. Emanuel Lee, *To the Bitter End: A Photographic History of the Boer War, 1899-1902* (London: Viking, 1985), pp. 3-12.
5. Johannes Meintjes, *The Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902: A Pictorial History* (Cape Town: C. Struik, 1976).
6. Some of the most telling critiques of photography concern images of 'the Other' and their limitations as sources. See, for example, Elizabeth Edwards, *Anthropology and Photography, 1860-1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); J. Falconer, 'Photography in Nineteenth-Century India', in *The Raj: India and the British, 1600-1947*, ed. C. Bayly (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1990); P. Richardson Fleming and J. Luskey, *The North American Indian in Early Photography* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986); S. Graham-Brown, *Images of Women: The Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East, 1860-1950* (London: Quartet Books, 1988); R.M. Levine, *Images of History: Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Latin American Photographs as Documents* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1989); G. Seiberling, *Amateurs, Photography and the Mid-Victorian Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); *Commonwealth Focus: 130 Years of Photographic History* (Australia Council, 1982).
7. To adapt a key term in Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995).
8. Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 211.
9. Raymond Evans et al., *Exclusion, Exploitation and Extermination: Race Relations in Colonial Queensland* (Sydney: Australia and New Zealand Book Company, 1975), pp. 49, 61.
10. The term is used repeatedly in a series of monthly articles by Col. F.W. Toll, DSO, 'Reminiscences of the Boer War, 1899-1902', in *The Queensland Digger* (Brisbane), 1933-1935.
11. Trooper Herbert S. Conder, 3rd Queensland Mounted Infantry, diary entry, Pretoria, 15-30 September 1900. PR 84/131, Australian War Memorial Library 419/60/38.
12. Major Walter Tunbridge was born in Dover in 1856, immigrated to Australia in 1884, and established an architectural firm in Townsville. He designed government buildings in the Solomon Islands and British Melanesia, as well as Queensland, an experience reflected in the two Melanesian photographs in his 'Boer War album'. Commissioned a lieutenant in the Queensland Land Forces in 1889, he helped break the famous Queensland shearers' strike of 1891. He was promoted to Captain in June 1892, and Major in 1898. In recognition of his services in the South African War, Major Tunbridge was awarded a CB, the Queen's South Africa Medal with five clasps, and made a brevet lieutenant-

colonel. After the war he served as ADC to the Governor-General of Australia (1902-09), married (1904), served in World War I, rising to the rank of Colonel, and was awarded a CMG (1917) and CBE (1919). He returned to architecture in Melbourne after the war and died in 1943.

13. B 5199, Service Rolls, Third Queensland Mounted Infantry, Australian National Archives, Melbourne. The first and second contingents of Queensland Mounted Infantry were drawn from existing militia units. The Queenslanders were 'bushies', unlike most Australian troopers who were recruited from the urban working class. See W.M. Chamberlain, 'The Characteristics of Australia's Boer War Volunteers', *Historical Studies*, XX, 78 (1982), pp. 48-52.
14. Major Tunbridge, Report of Disturbances on the *Morayshire*, 5 June 1901; Capt. Horn, Report, 4 June 1901; Sgt. Walker H. Thompson, 3rd Victorian Contingent, Testimony, 20 May 1901, B168/01/696, Australian Archives, Melbourne. See also R.L. Wallace, *The Australians at the Boer War* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1976), p. 354.
15. The military exploits of the Third Queensland Mounted Infantry have been the subject of several celebratory tomes. See Lieut.-Colonel P.L. Murray, *Official Record of the Australian Military Contingents to the War in South Africa* (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1911); Len Harvey, *Letters from the Veldt: An Account of the Involvement of Volunteers from Queensland at the War in South Africa (Boer War) 1899-1902* (Harvey Bay: R. & J. McTaggart, 1994); J. Stirling, *The Colonials in South Africa, 1899-1902* (1907; Edinburgh: J.B. Hayward, 1990), pp. 441-443.
16. The Rhodesian period is represented in two photos by Tunbridge: one labelled 'Mashona', of a couple with two children all in 'traditional' dress; the other, 'Matebele woman', with a pot on her head and a baby on her back.
17. Tunbridge to C.O. Brisbane, Report No. 7, 15 September 1900, MP744/1/1015, Australian Archives, Melbourne. Also *Queenslander* (Brisbane), 20 October 1900, p. 823; *Chronicle* (Maryborough), 16 October 1900.
18. Len Harvey, *Letters from the Veldt*, p. 81.
19. Trooper Herbert S. Conder, 3rd Queensland Mounted Infantry, diary, Pretoria, 4 August 1900. PR 84/131, Australian War Memorial Library 419/60/38.
20. Major Tunbridge, Report No. 10, Pretoria, 20 January 1901, MP744/3/2275, Australian Archives, Melbourne.
21. *Chronicle* (Maryborough), 2 May 1901.
22. The use of the term 'nigger' was common, even in official reports, reflecting the racism of the era. Major Tunbridge, Report No. 6, Eland River, 30 July 1900, MP744/3/7032, Australian Archives, Melbourne.
23. Peter Warwick, *Black People and the South African War, 1899-1902* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 145-162.
24. His field diaries, in the possession of his daughters, contain only cryptic references to locations, movements, and provisioning.
25. Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 22 *passim*.
26. Among Major Tunbridge's collection of 'African curios' is a beaded necklace very similar to that hanging between the breasts of 'Swazi Girl, S. Africa'.